Claim 12 (currently amended): A ~~support disc in accordance with claim 1,~~ ceramic heat conductor support disc for supporting an electrical heating element for electrically heated industrial furnace installations, said support disc comprising: a disc body having a predetermined thickness; a center aperture having a central axis lying parallel to a longitudinal axis of the disc body and of a heating element; at least one intermediate aperture located between said center aperture and an outer periphery of the disc body; wherein the disc includes at least one elongated opening extending from said periphery to at least one of said intermediate apertures; wherein each elongated opening extends through the entire thickness of said disc and the number of elongated openings is less than the number of intermediate apertures; wherein the at least one elongated opening extends from an outwardly-positioned intermediate aperture to an inwardly-positioned intermediate aperture, relative to the disc periphery; and wherein the at least one elongated opening serves to reduce thermal stresses produced within the support disc during heating of the heating element to reduce thermally induced disc cracking during exposure of the support disc to furnace operating temperatures and to thermal cycling.

Claim 13 (currently amended): A ~~support disc in accordance with claim 1,~~ ceramic heat conductor support disc for supporting an electrical heating element for electrically heated industrial furnace installations, said support disc comprising: a disc body having a predetermined thickness; a center aperture having a central axis lying parallel to a longitudinal axis of the disc body and of a heating element; at

least one intermediate aperture located between said center aperture and an outer periphery of the disc body; wherein the disc includes at least one elongated opening extending from said periphery to at least one of said intermediate apertures; wherein each elongated opening extends through the entire thickness of said disc and the number of elongated openings is less than the number of intermediate apertures; wherein the at least one elongated opening has a width that varies along the length of the elongated opening; and wherein the at least one elongated opening serves to reduce thermal stresses produced within the support disc during heating of the heating element to reduce thermally induced disc cracking during exposure of the support disc to furnace operating temperatures and to thermal cycling.